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Dean Nicholson

One of the greatest basketball coaches in college basketball history at any level.

That is the best way to describe Dean Nicholson, who was Central Washington University's head basketball coach for 26 seasons before retiring following the 1989-90 campaign.

Nicholson, who won 889 games in a career that spanned five decades, completed his career at Yakima Valley College during the 1997-98 season, guiding the Indians to a 22-11 record. In three seasons at YVC, he won 72 games and lost 24, including a 26-5 record in 1996-97 when he led Yakima to a third-place finish in the NWAACC state tournament.

Prior to taking over at YVC, Nicholson had been retired since completing a two-year stint (1991-92) with the Yakima SunKings of the CBA.

In his final season at Central in 1990, Nicholson became only the 17th coach in the entire history of intercollegiate basketball to win 600 games.

He also qualified his team for the NAIA national tournament in Kansas City for a record 22nd time and he became the winningest coach in the history of the national tournament with 38 victories.

Nicholson is a member of three Hall-of-Fames - the Washington State Basketball Coaches Association Hall-of-Fame, the CWU Hall-of-Fame and NAIA Hall-of-Fame.

Only twice in 26 years at CWU did he fail to win at least 20 games. Six times he guided teams into the NAIA Final Four, placing second in 1970, third in 1967, 1969, 1987 and 1989 and fourth in 1985.

His 1970 squad won 31 games, including a school-record 25 straight, and he was voted NAIA Coach-of-the-Year. In 1987, the 'Cats posted a school-record 32 wins and Dean was selected Northwest Small-College Coach-of-the-Year for the second time in his career. His 1989 team equaled that school record with 32 victories. He also won the Northwest Coach-of-the-Year award following the 1990 season.

On seven different occasions he was voted NAIA District 1 Coach-of-the-Year. In 1987, he was voted as one of the five coaches on the NAIA's 50th anniversary all-time team.

Nicholson received numerous other honors during his illustrious coaching career. In 1970 he coached at the USA - Pan American Developmental Camp. He was the NAIA representative to the U.S. Olympic Basketball Committee and coached at the Olympic camp and trials in 1971 and 1972.

He was the head coach for AAU teams which toured South America in 1972 and 1973 and for the NAIA All-Star team in the Cup of Nations tournament in Colombia in 1974.

He was an assistant coach for the West team in the 1982 National Sports Festival in Indianapolis, Ind., and served as a member of the NABC's Hall-of-Fame committee. A charter member of the CWU Hall-of-Fame, he was inducted into the NAIA Hall-of-Fame in 1986, joining his father in that institution.

Nicholson and his father Leo are the winningest father-son coaching combination in the history of collegiate basketball with 1,114 victories at the four-year level. Leo won 505 games from the fall of 1929 before retiring in 1964.

Nicholson also enjoyed a great playing career at CWU. He earned all-conference honors four straight seasons in basketball, leading the Wildcats to a conference title in 1947 and their first NAIA national tournament berth in 1950.

He scored 1,377 points which still ranks ninth on the school's all-time list. In 1950, he made 83 percent of his free throws.

Nicholson also lettered in tennis and baseball. He led the Evergreen Conference in hitting in 1950. Off the field, he was elected president of the student body.

After earning a bachelor of arts degree in 1950, he taught mathematics and served as the head basketball coach at Puyallup High School for 14 seasons, winning five Puget Sound titles and compiling a record of 192-113.

In the fall of 1964 he returned to Ellensburg after being named to succeed his father as head basketball coach. In addition to coaching basketball, he was the school's baseball coach in 1967 and tennis coach in 1965 and 1966 and from 1968 until 1978.

Nicholson earned his masters degree from CWU in 1957. He also attended the University of Washington, Oregon State University, Seattle Pacific University and Western Washington University. In 1983 he was honored with CWU's Distinguished Teacher award.

Nicholson was born June 28, 1926 in Seattle. He graduated from Ellensburg High School in 1944 where he earned all-state honors in basketball and was a Yakima Valley tennis champion.

He and his wife, Charlene, who now reside in Concord, Calif., were married June 18, 1948. They have two grown sons, Joel and Gary.

Nicholson's Coaching Record

Year	W	Overall		PA	W	L	Conference	
		L	PF				Finish	Home
1951	12	7						
1952	15	6						
1953	16	6						
1954	16	10						
1955	20	6						
1956	23	4						
1957	6	14						
1958	9	15						
1959	14	6						
1960	7	11						
1961	16	4						
1962	18	5						
1963	11	7						
1964	7	12						
1965	20	6	2108	1863	9	1	1st	12-3
1966	21	8	2260	2026	9	3	2nd	7-2
1967	27	4	2552	2107	8	1	1st	11-0
1968	22	8	2380	2046	10	2	1st	11-3
1969	24	9	2500	2206	8	4	1st	11-2
1970	31	2	2432	2141	12	0	1st	10-0
1971	24	9	2569	2243	11	3	1st-T	12-1
1972	17	9	2121	1978	9	3	2nd-T	10-1
1973	20	9	1842	1711	11	1	1st	12-1

1974	17	10	2095	2031	8	4	1st-T	12-0
1975	23	6	2284	1944	10	2	1st	12-1
1976	23	7	2235	2019	9	3	2nd	9-3
1977	24	8	2325	2097	11	1	1st-T	14-1
1978	21	8	2219	1966	9	3	1st-T	15-0
1979	25	6	2399	2027				11-1
1980	27	6	2520	2169	6	2	1st-T	12-2
1981	21	12	2280	2155				11-4
1982	22	7	2133	1909				12-0
1983	7	23	2395	2007				4-9
1984	23	10	2446	2210	3	1	1st	9-2
1985	25	11	2736	2491	5	1	1st	12-1
1986	27	6	2530	2319	4	0	1st	12-1
1987	32	9	3330	2861				13-2
1988	23	11	2909	2467				13-1
1989	32	10	3378	2847				12-3
1990	31	5	2949	2429				12-1
1991	15	41						
1992	1	7						
1996	24	8						
1997	26	5						
1998	22	11						
Totals		609	219	.736	CWU	291	45	
	192	113	.630	Puyallup				
	72	24	.750	YVC				
	16	48	.250	SunKings				
	889	404	.688	Total				

Note: CWU posted record of 26-4 in 1983 before forfeiting 19 games.